



RESOURCES

News about nature, history and horticulture in Fairfax County

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Invite the Wild to Your Backyard!

By Maria Parisi, Habitat Steward and Volunteer

Have you wanted to enjoy more wildlife in your own backyard? Watch a butterfly break out of its chrysalis, follow the flight of a hummingbird, invite songbirds to feast on berries outside your kitchen window, maybe even spot a turtle enjoying a mini backyard wetland?

You can attract wildlife by providing the four elements basic for their survival: food, water, cover and places to raise young. By incorporating these elements into your landscape, you can be a steward of the land and help restore habitat that is being lost every year. A great way to see the basic elements in action is at Hidden Pond Nature Center's Community Wildlife Habitat.

The habitat is the work of a group of volunteers, trained through a National Wildlife Federation (NWF) program as Habitat Stewards, and other volunteers. They are donating their time to create a more-diverse wildlife habitat at Hidden Pond. This community project is designed to demonstrate how other visitors can make their own personal or public spaces—like schoolyards or the grounds around apartment complexes— more attractive and hospitable to wildlife.

The project began with the vision of Jim Pomeroy, manager of Hidden Pond Nature Center, and a partnership with Cindy Brown, interpretative horticulturist at Green Spring Gardens Park. In the summer of 2000, Cindy hosted the NWF's Habitat Stewards Training Program. The curriculum

► **Invite the Wild** *continued on page 10*

AFRICAN AMERICAN SERVICE *in the War of 1812*

By Barbara Ziman, Special Events Coordinator

The War of 1812 was the result of a number of ongoing differences between the United States and Great Britain. In 1807 Britain began seizing American vessels at sea. As well, captured American sailors were held by the British as deserters and forced to serve in the British Navy. A third irritant was Britain's placement of restrictions on U.S. trade.

Back at home, the United States felt that British officials were urging Indians in the Great Lakes area to attack American settlements. While the British controlled Canada, U.S. settlers would never be safe. All of these factors came together, and the United States declared war on Britain on June 17, 1812.

Prior to this time, African American enlistment in the U.S. Army and Navy was banned by law. Despite the ban free blacks, along with some slaves, had served in the U.S. Navy since its formation in 1794. In 1813,

Congress passed a law authorizing the enlistment of "persons of color, natives of the U. States."

During the War of 1812, black men accounted for between 15 and 20 percent of enlisted men on all ships and all stations in the United States Navy. Obtaining crewmen was generally the responsibility of the commanding officer, and at sea the color of a man's skin was much less important than his skills and abilities. While prejudice and racism existed, by 1814 black and white soldiers and sailors fought and died side by side in line of battle and on warship gun decks.

African Americans served with distinction in a variety of roles during the War of 1812. In the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813, Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, after initial complaints about these servicemen, spoke highly of the African Americans' bravery and good

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Spring flings

"A Very Good Likeness"

Portraits in Early America, 1750-1860 will be the subject of a symposium on Friday, March 28, sponsored by the Fairfax County Park Authority and the George Mason University History Department. The four presentations focus on portrait paintings, silhouettes, early daguerreotypes — emphasizing their significance and placement in the American home — and portraits as a resource for historic costume. Prepaid registrations must be postmarked by March 14. For information and registration forms, email susan.clark@fairfaxcounty.gov or phone Historic Collections at 703-631-1429.

EDITOR'S NOTE

As many of you may have realized, the bird on our winter front cover was *not* a bald eagle at all. So we have held a contest for readers, announced online, asking readers to identify the mystery bird.

Our experts, and a number of our readers, told us the cover bird is a white-headed vulture from Africa. It has a six-foot wing span and weighs up to 20 pounds! Definitely not a bald eagle.

Among our numerous identifiers was Jim Wolcott, a long-time birder who actually saw the vulture during a birding trip to Kenya and Tanzania. Congratulations to Jim! He wins a copy of David Allen Sibley's recent *Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*.

Jim's favorite birding place here is Huntley Meadows Park, the 1,424-acre wetland and forested jewel that is a regional hotspot for birders. This spring you might visit its wonderful boardwalk and see the many migrating and resident birds that rely on this oasis for food and shelter.

Jane Scully, Editor

Hike from Seneca to Riverbend

On Friday, April 18, hike this six-mile trek along the Potomac River through a variety of habitats, including open meadows, swamp, floodplain and upland forest. Witness remains of the Patowmack canal and admire its engineering. Take the chance to absorb the beauty of the carpets of blooms of wildflowers. Be prepared for creek crossings and wet areas. This hike for adults will run from 7:30 am to 2 pm. Meet at the Riverbend Park Visitor Center. Wear sturdy hiking shoes or boots and dress for weather and bring a bag lunch. Reservations are required and the cost is \$8. Call 703-759-9018.



Wetland Wednesdays for Youngsters

May is Wetland Awareness Month and we at Hidden Pond want our visitors who are eight years old and up to get to know our various wetland habitats better. For the first program on May 7, from 4 to 5:30 pm, we will look at vernal pools, springs and seeps. Up close you will discover that they are full of life. Call for information on this and other weekly programs. A walk into the swamp is included. Footwear that can get wet and dirty is a must. Each program is \$5. Call Hidden Pond at 703-451-9588 for more information and reservations.

On the Trail of John S. Mosby

Join a van trip through "Mosby Country" to visit the sites of the legendary adventures of the Civil War's boldest guerrilla fighter. In Warrenton, learn about his post-war adventures. There are two trips scheduled, on Tuesday, May 20 and Friday, June 6. Both run from 8 am to 4:30 pm from Hidden Oaks Nature Center. Door prizes will be awarded. Bring a bag lunch and make reservations one week ahead. Program cost is \$15. Call Hidden Oaks at 703-941-1065.

Easter Egg Hunting in the Parks



From 1 to 3 pm on Saturday, April 12, at Colvin Run Mill, children ages two to nine can hunt for hand-dyed eggs, make a craft, listen to stories by Mason Talespinner and meet the Easter Bunny. Non-refundable \$4 reservations are required by April 2. Call 703-759-2771.

Also on Saturday, April 12, children can celebrate spring at Sully Historic Site's Easter Egg Hunt, from 2 to 4 pm. As well as an egg hunt, children can participate in an Easter Egg Roll just as children did at the Capitol during the presidency of James Madison, and visit with baby animals on the south lawn. Call 703-437-1794 for information.



The Fairfax County Park Authority is committed to equal access in all programs and services. Special accommodations will be provided upon request. Please call the ADA/Access Coordinator at 703-324-8563, at least 10 working days in advance of the date services are needed. TTY (703) 803-3354 <http://www.co.fairfax.va.us/parks/ada.htm>

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To receive your free copy of **RESOURCES**, fill out the form on the back cover or register directly on our web site at www.co.fairfax.va.us/parks/resources.htm.

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LETTERBOXING—*Follow the Clues!*

By Kitty Keller, *Naturalist, Huntley Meadows Park*

The boulders and hemlocks create a feeling of closeness as I make the steady climb. I've come to this stream valley in search of a letterbox, a grown-up version of treasure hunting. Though to be honest, it is almost like being a kid again. From my field pack I pull the clues I printed from the Letterboxing website. It has directed me to some wonderful excursions. I unfold the paper and with a deep breath full of the scent of an approaching rain, my adventure begins.

Harriman Tracks #2 Beaver

Follow the unmarked woods road north.

Take the unmarked trail on the right soon after the waterfalls on the left.

Notice the beaver lodge, beaver trails and stump on the left.

There it is, the waterfall. And there's the path just beyond. The stump is pretty weatherworn. This box must have been here for some time. The creek's gossiping encourages me to linger and listen for the tales from upstream. My search can wait. The point of this hunt, after all, is to enjoy the journey. The titmice and the chickadees animate the trees overhead and beyond the stream the trout lily is just poking through the rich soil.

I sit for a short time but the damp chill of the moss-covered rocks begins to seep through my jeans and I need to get moving. On I go, my hunt continues.

Take the unmarked trail on the right

Go up to Lake Wanoksink and turn left onto a narrow footpath along the lake.

Stop at the beaver lodge to the right of the footpath.

The lake sits calm and still under the weight of the gray sky. I have to wonder how many people have paused here, witnesses to the coming and going of the days and the seasons. I check the directions again, now crumpled and a bit worse for the wear in my hand.

55 paces along the footpath see a second lodge at 310 degrees

and a 3rd across the swamp at 17 degrees

Here's where the real adventure begins. Though I've completed several letterboxing hunts, some far more complex and puzzling than this, this will be the first

that has required the use of a compass. ...53 ...54 ...55 degrees. There's the second lodge, looking unused, and the third with remains of a cache of winter food.

Return to the woods road.

Note the sawed-off post

Beaver track is under the rocks at 288 degrees

There's 288 degrees and... shouldn't there be rocks? Maybe I need to go off the trail a bit; there are rocks a bit further. I decide to check the compass again. I know these clues rarely take you off trail, there's a definite "leave no trace" rule in letterboxing. It's a good thing my survival is not based on the use of a compass. My adjusted course brings me to the intended rocks within reach of the trail. My heart quickens a bit; I brush away the leaves and reveal the treasure.

Letterboxing is an exciting, low-impact way for all ages to explore the natural world.

It's a simple plastic box, weatherproof not fancy. I peel back the lid and there inside is the stamp and a small notebook. From my field pack, I pull out my own notebook and add the beaver tracks stamp from the box to the next blank page. I think back to what I saw along the way and add a note to return and take the trail along the other side of the lake.

I pull out my own stamp, a dragonfly. The wings are a bit squared on one side where I slipped a bit while carving it. I thumb through the letterbox notebook, glancing at its history. People from all over have left their marks. Some quite elaborate, some simple. There's an owl from Maine and a sunflower from Ohio. There's the slightly smudged bear from a four-year-old who accompanied his granddad, the trout. I reach a blank page and leave my dragonfly. The ink bleeds in spots as I add a note, "The spring rains have started." 🐸

Huntley Meadows Park will hold a program on Letterboxing for nine- to 12-year-olds, from 3:30 to 5:30 pm. on Wednesday, March 10.

Participants will use orienteering skills to discover letterboxes hidden in the park. They will design their own stamps and help create clues to a new box.

Call 703-768-2525 for reservations.

Cost is \$5.

Sponsored by the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park.

For clues to find other letterboxes in Northern

Virginia, go to www.letterboxing.org and start your own outdoor quest!

Wildflowers

Spring is bloomin' out all over!

From February on, this mid-Atlantic area is a carpet of pink, blue, yellow and white wildflowers, in all sizes and shapes. Here, three of our seasoned wildflower enthusiasts tell you their prime wildflower places and what you'll find there. Enjoy!

G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area

By Janis Jeffers, Naturalist, Hidden Oaks Nature Center

Looking for spring wildflowers is an annual treasure hunt. The highlight of my spring wildflower walks is a hike through the G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area (WMA) near Linden, Virginia, to visit the trillium and other of my favorite spring wonders.

The mountainsides near Linden are carpeted with trillium flowers that demand your admiration in their breathtaking abundance. The trillium population here is the largest concentration in Virginia and may be the largest population in North America. It has been estimated that there are over 18 million plants!

Large-flowered trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) bloom bridal white at the end of April and blush to pink as they age. Trillium is one of the short-lived spring ephemerals, blooming early in the season to take advantage of the sunlight that reaches the forest floor before the deciduous trees leaf out. The common names wake-robin and snow trillium

allude to the early blooming period when snow may still be on the ground.

The plants are 6-to-20 inches tall and have petals, sepals and leaves in patterns of three. That "three-ness" is the source of "tri" in their name. Six (a multiple of three!) stamens are in the yellow centers of the flower.

Bees and butterflies pollinate the flowers but trillium owe their sowing to ants. Trillium seeds have an "oil body" called an elaisome that ants like to eat. The diligent ants gather the seeds and take them underground to their storage tunnels. They eat the elaisomes and leave the rest of the seed to sprout and grow in a new location.

Another favorite early bloomer is bloodroot, which has waxy looking flowers and gorgeous cut leaves that wrap protectively around the stem and flower, giving rise to another common name, papoose flower. Native Americans used the plant for dyes and paints as well as medicinally.

Other blooms adding color include beautiful yellow lady's slippers and wild geranium, with its lovely lavender flowers. The delicate dancing white flowers of rue anemone are rewarding to discover as well. Its leaves are arranged in a whorl and serve as a green dress to the never-still flower that stands only six or so inches tall. The flower is aptly named for Anemos, the Greek god of wind.

Visit the Wildlife Management Area in May to enjoy the trillium and other spring wildflowers. To reach the area, take the Linden exit (#13) off I-66. If the weather is springtime warm, do not forget the insect repellent! Happy hiking and wildflower hunting!

Hidden Oaks will host a Trillium Trek for adults to Linden on Tuesday, April 29, from 9 am to 4 pm. Call 703-941-1065 by April 24 for reservations. The fee for the trip is \$10. Bring your own lunch and wear hiking boots! 🥾



Bloodroot

Ellenor C. Lawrence Park

*By Charles Smith, Assistant Manager,
Ellenor C. Lawrence Park*

When people think of wildflowers in the Northern Virginia region, they usually think of Balls Bluff and Bull Run Regional Parks, Thompson Wildlife Management Area or maybe a favorite stream valley or field system. While I too think of those places, I have also had the good fortune of experiencing six springs at Ellenor C. Lawrence Park (ECLP) in Centreville/Chantilly, VA.

ECLP lies in the Northern Virginia piedmont and is comprised of about 660 mostly forested acres. Cedar and pine stands contrast with mature oak-hickory forest. Several streams drain the property, and the forest is broken up in places by fields, meadows and a pond. In short, ECLP is a rather large area where the earth breathes and nature can be seen in both variety and abundance.

In spring, my favorite walk is on the Walney Creek and Ridge Trails. "Spring" blooming along these trails begins as early as January or February with the appearance of skunk cabbage in seeps and the pinkish-to-lavender-to-white flowers of round-lobed hepatica at the base of oak trees on hillsides.

A stroll in early April south along Walney Creek Trail from Walney Visitor Center toward the pond will reward the visitor with an abundant display of spring ephemeral wildflowers such as spring beauty, common violet, wild blue phlox, bloodroot and wild geranium. Moist banks along the trail may have star chickweed and wild stonecrop blooming on them. As you approach the steel bridge over Big Rocky Run, look for trout lily with its yellow petals and mottled leaves blooming in the floodplain.

Go up the stairs on your right on the return trip. This brings you onto the Ridge Trail. On your left halfway up the first hill you may see smooth-



Trout lily

in Spring . . .



May Apple

yellow violet and wild ginger. All along the Ridge Trail keep a special lookout for mossy areas at the base of trees. These mossy patches frequently host rue anemone, early saxifrage, bluets and violet wood sorrel with its clover-like foliage.

Flowering dogwood, spicebush, low-bush blueberry, downy serviceberry and pink azalea are small trees and shrubs that can be seen blooming in many places along the way, but especially on the Ridge Trail.

Along these trails in spring, you could be surprised with a new type of blossom every time you round a bend or peek behind a tree. So as you feel the urge to wander this spring, remember to come out to Centreville and enjoy the sights and smells at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park.

The park will hold several wildflower walks for children this spring. On Sunday, April 13, children 10 years old and up are invited to a free program from 1 to 3 pm that includes a short slide show of spring bloomers, followed by a trail walk to observe and identify the real things. Bring your field guides.

On Saturday, April 26, children from three to eight years old can join a morning (10 to 11 am) program to see wildflowers growing around the nature center and hunt for Virginia bluebells, Dutchmen's breeches, violets and others. Wildflower crafts are included. An adult must accompany children. The cost is \$1 per person. For either program, call 703-631-0013 for reservations. 🌱

Lake Accotink Park

By Clara Ailes, Naturalist, Hidden Pond Nature Center

Each April I lead a spring wildflower walk at Lake Accotink in Springfield. This site may not have the spectacular show of places like Riverbend Park, but it is a particularly good place for the beginner because so much blooms here. Common spring flowers are easily found within a short distance of the parking lot along a level trail. As well, it's hard to beat the accessibility of Lake Accotink Park, which is centrally located in Fairfax County not far off the Beltway.

Our walk starts at the parking lot where common and mouse-ear chickweeds grow. Under a magnifying lens the white common chickweed flower shows that what look like 10 petals are really five, each of which is deeply cleft. Once in the woods the showier star chickweed is easily identified as a member of this family.

In the moist area near them are the large leaves of the skunk cabbage. Just crush a leaf, and the smell will tell you how it got its name! The colonists boiled the leaves and breathed the fumes to cure severe headaches, believing anything that smelt that bad must be good medicine! The brown, hooded flower of the skunk cabbage starts to appear as early as December, the leaves later. The plant's metabolism produces enough heat to warm the insects that pollinate it on a cold day.

A more-pleasant smell is found by scraping the underground stems of the low-growing wild ginger. Although not in the same family as the ginger sold in our stores, it has been used as a substitute. Its three-petaled maroon flower lies on the ground where it can be pollinated by beetles. The leaves are the same shape as violets, but sturdier.

Under the trees the double umbrella leaves of the May-apple hide its white waxy flower that looks like an apple blossom. All parts of the plant are poisonous except for the ripe fruit, which is a favorite food of the box turtles. Nearby stand the Jack-in-the-pulpits, with their tall, three-part leaves. The flower is underneath the leaves, with a club-like spadix (the "minister," Jack) standing in the curved ridged hood (pulpit). The color runs from green to purplish-brown.

If you don't mind continuing our hike through mud and poison ivy, you just may find the rare showy orchis. Its four-to-12-inch flower stalk rises between two large glossy green leaves. The flowers have pink-to-purple hoods over a white lip. This fragrant orchid provides a syrup rich in sugar. Such a discovery makes the entire journey worth making!

This spring's wildflower walk at Lake Accotink will be held on Saturday, April 12, from 10 to 11:30 am. Reservations are required and can be made by calling Hidden Pond Nature Center at 703-451-9588. The program is free. 🌱

Want to know what that pink flower you saw at Riverbend was? Or where to find bluebells? Check out our popular Nature Finder web feature and check your flower by color, kind of location, time of year, particular park—you name it. Our database will get you there—www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources.



Jack-in-the-Pulpit



Rue Anemone

Historic Huntley: Brick and Paint Tell the Tale

By Barbara Naef, Volunteer



Buildings that have survived a century or two present a wonderful challenge to those of us interested in the **what**, **how** and **why** of their past functions. **What** was the primary use of that building, room or area? **How** did people get from here to there, from the first to the second floor? **Why** was the structure designed and built in such a manner?

Seeking answers to questions such as these, the Park Authority contracted to have a Historic Structures Report completed for the

as-yet-to-be-restored Huntley Historic site in the southern part of Fairfax County. The report offers intriguing glimpses into the evolving story of the structures conceived and built in 1825 by Thomson Mason, grandson of George Mason of Gunston Hall.

Historical architect C. Richard Bierce, the consulting architect for the report, will give an illustrated presentation based on the report's results on Wednesday evening, March 12. Mr. Bierce's findings provide a fascinating glimpse into the

story and analysis of this Federal-style villa as the long process of its restoration begins.

Historic Huntley is a Virginia Landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It carries a significance that extends beyond the Mason family to the villa's architecture and landscaping. The remnants of its terraces and viewshed across what is now Huntley Meadows Park to Mount Vernon and the Potomac River add to the site's importance.

Assumptions as to the original configuration of the main house have driven many theories over the past several decades. Because no interior stairway exists to the upper level of the house, the original central room was envisioned to extend in height from the ground floor to the roof, in effect a grand salon of sorts in a summer retreat. The ceiling creating a floor and room above this central space was presumed to have been installed at some later time.

Reservations for the 7:30-to-8:30 lecture can be made by calling Huntley Meadows at 703-768-2525. The cost is \$3. The program is sponsored by the Friends Groups of Historic Huntley and Huntley Meadows Park. Reservations for Friends members are free. 🌿

BIRDS EVERYWHERE!

So many birds, so little time. Choose one of our many birding programs this spring to learn about and travel to prime birding spots to witness this dramatic spring phenomenon. Bring binoculars and field guide, wear sturdy shoes, dress for the weather, bring a bag lunch if timing requires, and make your reservations at least a week in advance.

March 8, Saturday—Bluebird program for Children

For 6-year-olds and up, from 10 to 11 am at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park. After a short slide show, each child will build a nest box to take home. Bring a hammer. Bluebird box kit is \$15. Program repeats from 1 to 2 pm. Reservations can be made at 703-631-0013.

March 9, Sunday—Birding for Beginners

For adults, from 7 to 10 am, at Huntley Meadows Visitor Center. Learn about the birds in the park, field guides and optics and some basic identification skills. A free program; reservations made at 703-786-2525.

April 13, Sunday is Birding for Beginners II, from 7:30 to 10:30 am. Sharpen your bird identification skills. Program begins with a brief discussion of spring migration. Also free, also requiring reservations.

March 25, Tuesday—Birding at Pope's Creek Plantation

For adults, from 7 am to 3 pm. Bald eagles, loons, ducks, swans and terns are probable finds. Reservations for the \$15 program can be made through Huntley Meadows at 703-768-2525.

April 26, Saturday—Birding at South King's Highway

For adults, from 7 to 10 am. This is the height of Neotropical songbird migration.



Meet at Huntley Meadows' South King's Highway/ Telegraph Road entrance. This is a free program, with reservations made at 703-768-2525.

May 2, Friday—On the Way North

For 12 year olds and up, from 8 am to 5 pm. Witness migrating warblers and other songbirds at Westmoreland State Park and points on the Potomac River. Make reservations through Hidden Oaks at 703-941-1065 for the \$15 trip.

May 3, Saturday—Bird Hike at Ellanor C. Lawrence Park

For 10-year-olds and up, from 8 to 10:30am, from Walney Visitor Center. See and hear colorful spring migrant and resident songbirds and other species on a two-mile naturalist-led hike through varied park habitats. Call 703-631-0013 for free reservations.

May 9 Friday—Birding Hughes Hollow

For adults, from 9 am to 3 pm, from Riverbend Visitor Center. Hughes Hollow, along the Maryland side of the Potomac River, supports diverse habitats for bird species. Explore the impoundments, forest edges, evergreen groves and fields for a variety of birds. For reservations to the \$15 program, call 703-759-9018. 🌿

Accessible Features at Outdoor Facilities

By Gary Logue, Park Authority ADA Specialist

Suffering from cabin fever and ready for some fresh air? In keeping with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and a long-standing commitment to providing leisure-time opportunities for all Fairfax County residents, the Park Authority offers a diversity of recreation facilities and experiences. Here is a small

sample of the many ADA-accessible features in the park system. Please feel free to contact the ADA Specialist at 703-324-8563 for questions regarding specific accessibility features in the parks.

Boating... Burke Lake Park features an accessible boat dock with a lift (the installation of the lift is pending). Lake Accotink offers pontoon boat rides around the lake with full access to the boat and pier.

Concerts... Lee District Park and Mason District Park both provide an accessible platform to view the free summer concerts. Mason District also has accessible restrooms located near the amphitheater.

Farm Life... Frying Pan Park preserves Fairfax County's rural heritage with farm equipment, barns, animals, and big events like horse and 4-H shows and many others. The flat grounds are accessible.

Fishing... Burke Lake Park provides an accessible fishing pier to catch those whales lurking beneath the surface. Lake Accotink features an accessible fishing platform to the streambed, located at the lower parking lot beneath the railroad bridge.

Gardening... Nottoway Park provides accessible garden plots with raised beds that are available for rent. To reserve a plot, call 703-642-5174.

Hiking/Trails... Huntley Meadows Park features accessible trails leading from the Visitor's Center and a boardwalk trail offering breathtaking views of the wetlands and wildlife. Ellanor C. Lawrence Park has accessible trails and historical sites.

Historical Facilities... Sully Historic Site and Colvin Run Mill provide a glimpse of life long ago and offer many accessible features.

Horticulture... Green Spring Gardens Park Horticulture Center provides accessible pathways around the gardens. The center is fully accessible as well. If you choose to visit the historic manor house, a vertical lift provides access.



Colvin Run Mill's New Waterwheel—Grinding Again!

Come join in the gala at Colvin Run Mill Historic Site to celebrate the brand-new waterwheel! Park Authority carpenters have spent a year on this project, and this spring the mill machinery will come to life once more. While the actual date has not been set, we'll keep you posted. FREE tours of the mill and other activities for all ages will be offered throughout the day.

Colvin Run Mill is an award-winning technological marvel. Built before electricity, the mill has relied on the power of water and the strength of wood to run its machinery for nearly 200 years. Thirty years ago a new wooden waterwheel was built so visitors could continue to see 19th century innovations at work. Over time, weather and water deteriorated that wheel beyond repair.

Fairfax County Park Authority carpenters built both the new flume and waterwheel out of white oak. The flume is the long wooden box that extends over the top of the wheel. Once the end gate is opened, the water begins to flow.

It pours into one of the 60 golden oak waterwheel buckets. When a sufficient weight of water—about 150 pounds—fills several buckets, it causes the new wheel to turn. This powers a sophisticated set of wooden gears inside to turn the heavy grindstones,

producing grain just as it was done during the early 1800s.

So come hear the gears rumble and the grinding stones hum. See the water sparkle as it splashes across the golden oak water-wheel buckets. Buy a bag of freshly ground grain in a commemorative bag. Celebrate a day of historical technology brought back by today's artisans.

A photo-essay on Colvin Run Mill's history and current restoration will be available mid-March at *Resources Online* at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resources.

Colvin Run Mill is located on Leesburg Pike (Route 7) in Great Falls. Call 703-759-2771 for more information. ♻️



SPRING BIRD MIGRATION

By Leon Nawojchik, Manager, Ellanor C. Lawrence Park

Spring is here. The days are lengthening and the temperatures are warming. Now is an excellent time to see and study birds. Many of them are at a peak of activity, have their brightest colors and are very vocal. You can visit natural park areas on your own or join a scheduled nature center hike. Several sites have bird checklists showing what you might expect to see. And during migration there is always the possibility of a surprise sighting.

Why do birds migrate? Some don't migrate at all. Many species like backyard cardinals and chickadees are permanent residents, never travelling far from home. Other species winter here from higher latitudes or altitudes, enjoying our relatively warmer climate, and then leave in the spring. Some neotropical migrants may travel hundreds or thousands of miles to truly warm places.

The species' choice of whether to migrate or not is a careful ecological and evolutionary "calculation" worked out over thousands of years to maximize success. Species that stay at home avoid the stresses and dangers of long flights but have to endure reduced food supplies and harsh weather. Active migrants may find abundant winter food by going south but suffer from predation, storms, accidents, navigational errors and physiological stress. Some long-distance flyers may lose up to one-third of their body weight during migration. Generally those that depend on food like caterpillars, fresh fruits or nectar, or on conditions like warm weather, must leave.

As day length increases incrementally in the spring, the bird registers changes in brain tissue that initiate hormonal changes. Increased hormone levels cause feather molt, sexual changes and the urge to travel ("migratory restlessness").

How do they find their way? For thousands of years people have wondered about and admired bird flight and migration. Over many years researchers have uncovered several special avian abilities. Some species have been shown to be sensitive to the earth's magnetic field. Others can use the nighttime star patterns to find their way, often back to the locality in which they hatched.



The downy woodpecker is a year-round resident in our area.



A king rail is an exciting spring find.



Bluebirds can have several broods each spring.

Many small species travel at night, possibly to avoid hawks. Some larger species like geese typically travel in daylight. Their V-shaped flocks provide aerodynamic efficiency and leadership from experienced front birds. These longer-lived geese make use of landmarks such as coastlines, mountain ranges and river valleys that can be remembered from past trips.

Often birds may wait for changing winds to assist their flights. At times they may be way off course. They may be subject to strong winds, storm fronts, individual errors or quirks. During migration season, birders know that, if they are lucky, almost any species in the book may show up.

Many individual birds do not make the trip. They may perish from unexpected rain or ice storms. Some are caught by hawks or falcons. Others may be blown out to sea. Man-made structures also take their toll. Tall, lighted office buildings and lighthouses may be littered with the bodies of dead songbirds that were confused and drawn in to a sudden collision. Some localities reduce lighting in tall structures during peak migration hours.

The populations of many spring songbirds are declining. Human-caused changes to the landscape such as development and forest fragmentation take their toll here. Slash-and-burn agricultural practices and the clear-cutting of tropical forests are also reducing available wintering grounds.

Recent climate changes affected by global warming are causing new vegetation patterns, new weather patterns and changes in the dates of emergence for leaves and insects. Timing is important. Typically an increase in the length of the day is followed by the budding of young leaves, then the emergence of insects and finally by the arrival of birds. Some bird species will be able to adapt to changes in the timing of these natural events. Others, especially those that are isolated or limited in number, may not survive.

This spring many of us will make time to see and enjoy our colorful and varied songsters. It is also an important moment to pause and reflect on the complexities of migration and the conservation needs of the future. 🌱

UPDATING YOUR LANDSCAPE

By Sandy Flowers, Outreach Program Coordinator, Green Spring Gardens

Say the word *renovation*, and visions of kitchen remodeling leap to mind. We tend to forget that garden landscapes need updating, too. While we are willing to replace a sofa when it becomes lumpy and misshapen, we are not as likely to replace the overgrown shrub in our outdoor living space (hort-speak for "yard"). Yet rejuvenating a tired landscape can bring a greater return than remodeling a kitchen or bath.

Okay, so where to begin? Do *not* drive to the nursery to buy new plants. That method is guaranteed to cost you pots of money with no positive effect. It is much better to plan ahead and save for the project that will have a major impact on improving your landscape.

FIRST, make a list of wants and needs.

Do you need more entertaining space outdoors? How about a garden shed to store tools? Where will the basketball hoop go? (Not next to Mom's prized roses!)

SECOND, decide what style you want for your landscape.

There are so many choices! Take a few evenings to drool your way through gardening magazines. Clip out pictures that appeal to you. Put them in a notebook or on a bulletin board. Look for common themes or repetition in the pictures. This can be a tremendous help toward editing the vast number of options and helping you identify your style.

THIRD, do a site analysis of your yard (I mean... outdoor living space).

Skip this step at your peril! You need an understanding of what physical problems you must solve and what conditions exist for plants. Find a copy of your house plat in the paperwork from when you purchased your house or call the county's Zoning and Permit Review Board at 703-222-1082. Enlarge the plan and make several copies.

Now sharpen your pencil and get out your tape measure. This doesn't have to be a pretty drawing, just to convey the information you need. Mark the direction "North" on the map and look where the sun is at different times of day; write it down. Draw

circles around problem areas: bad drainage, difficult slope, overgrown trees and shrubs blocking sidewalks or windows.

Where are the water spigots, meters, heat pump? Mark down sidewalks and informal paths. Call Miss Utility (1-800-257-7777) and have them mark your utility lines. If you have a Homeowners' Association, check the rules and regulations about fences, sheds and decks.

This information can save you a lot of money and grief. Now get out tracing paper and place your wants and needs over the plat information. Just draw circles of what you want in each area. You'll quickly see that footings for a deck can't go over utility lines or a prickly holly in front of the water spigot.

FOURTH, prioritize.

What is the most important change you want to make? (Put in a slate patio?) What needs to happen first? (Remove existing overgrown shrubs?) Research costs and set a budget. Will you do it in stages or get a home equity loan and do it all at once? What can you reasonably do yourself and what must you get a professional to do?

FIFTH, find reliable landscape professionals to do the work you can't.

Interview several, asking for references. Go see work they have done. Determine who is most willing to work with you and listen to your ideas. This will avoid getting a "formula" landscape, using the same 10 plants regardless of location, house or owner. If trees or shrubs are to be removed, be sure the professional is licensed and bonded.

With the most important work done using your brain, you are ready to update your landscape with a careful plan, undertaking the transformation in affordable stages and solving existing problems. A tired landscape CAN grow into beautiful outdoor living space! As for the sofa, how about reupholstering? 🌱



Sandy Flowers will teach an upcoming class at Green Spring Gardens, entitled Rejuvenating Older Landscapes, on April 12, from 10 to 11:30 am. To register, call 703-642-5173. The cost is \$7.

► Invite the Wild *continued from page 1*

included the basic elements of habitat and the needs of birds, butterflies and other pollinators; the benefits of using native plants; and site planning and habitat design.

As part of the program, students visited Hidden Pond to conduct a site evaluation and then worked in teams to design plans to convert a one-acre plot into a wildlife habitat. The site was overgrown with invasive plants and impassable except for a pathway down the center.

That winter a group of volunteer Habitat Stewards decided to take the training one step further and actually execute the design plan. Neighbors of the park who love gardening and the outdoors soon joined the planning effort. Several young Mormon men offered to do the major work of clearing the site and planting grass. Thus encouraged, volunteers started holding monthly "work parties" in spring 2001.

Work began in the **shade garden**, with volunteers "rescuing" spring ephemerals and ferns from the site of a future trail through the woods. They used existing trees and newly planted small native trees and shrubs to provide food as well as layers of plant growth that offer protection to wildlife.

Girl Scout Troop 816 adopted the **rain garden**, successfully applying for a grant of over \$2,000 from the county's Water Authority for planting and educational materials. Moisture-tolerant plants enhance the rain garden and

Strategies for Conservation and Stewardship

- Use native plants
- Reduce lawn size and increase plant diversity
- Use a mulching mower
- Eliminate pesticides
- Create a compost pile and use organic fertilizers

Basic Habitat Elements

- ✓ Food to meet year-round needs—such as acorns, berries, nuts, seeds, buds and nectar
- ✓ Water for drinking, bathing and breeding—such as with a bird bath, spring, water garden, stream or pond
- ✓ Cover to protect against the elements and predators for feeding, hiding, courting, and nesting—such as dense shrubs, evergreens, a brush pile, hollow logs, rock piles/walls, ground covers and meadow patches
- ✓ Places to raise young—such as trees with nest/den cavities, shrubs, dens in the ground, water gardens/ponds and nesting boxes

filter runoff. A birdbath adds another water element to the habitat.

In the spring of 2002, volunteers planted an **herb garden** alongside the former kitchen

of a 19th-century farmhouse. The addition of two park benches makes the habitat more inviting to human guests.

In recognition of efforts to provide habitat for wildlife, the NWF recently certified the Hidden Pond habitat as a Backyard Wildlife Habitat™. Future plans for the habitat include the addition of **butterfly and hummingbird gardens** in the spring of 2003, a brick path to make the site more accessible, and more plants and landscaping touches.

The "community" in Community Wildlife Habitat is an important feature of this project.



If you would like to join the volunteers working with the Habitat Stewards for this project—including adopting a plot, donating plants or helping to create the butterfly and hummingbird habitats—contact Jim Pomeroy at 703-451-9588. 🌱

► Service *continued from page 1*



Used with permission from the website www.brigniagara.org.

conduct on board the brig *Niagara*. At the Battle of New Orleans in 1814, the Battalion of Free Men of Color was with General Jackson. They held their portion of the line against British attack and then counterattacked. Jackson said, "I expected much from you...but you surpass my hopes...the American nation shall applaud your valor, as your General now praises your ardor."

The Treaty of Ghent, signed December 24, 1814, to end the War of 1812, removed the hope of liberty for African Americans when it called for mutual restoration of properties. This meant a forced return to slavery of these black servicemen, whose courage in war did not change their official status as property.

Discover more about America's Second War for Independence at Sully's all-day muster reenactment on Saturday, May 10. To learn about blacks in the War of 1812, particularly their role in Commodore Perry's Victory on Lake Erie, read *Amongst My Best Men: African Americans and the War of 1812*, published in 1996 by the Friends of Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial, South Bass Island, Ohio. 🌱

War of 1812 Muster at Sully Historic Site

On Saturday, May 10, be a part of a centuries-old tradition. Military musters were a time of recruitment and training for the Army and Navy, and socializing for civilians. Drill with the troops and learn about early military life on land and sea during America's Second War for Independence. Dance to period tunes and sing along with Ship's Company Chanteymen. Play games that were popular in the early 1800s, enjoy a puppet show and see picnic foods prepared in our open-hearth kitchen. Discover more about the role of the African Americans in the military during the War of 1812. Call Sully Historic Site for more information at 703-437-1794.

ASF—Alexandria's Best-Kept Secret

By Jennifer McDonnell, Environmental Education Director, Alexandria Seaport Foundation

I have been a part of the Hidden Oaks Nature Center (HONC) family since 1990. As a volunteer I have kept a vigilant eye out for poison ivy on nature walks and made sure small children did not fall into it. I have mulched trails, cleaned up snake poop, swept floors, made and carried gallons and gallons of lemonade for summer camps.

I think I got bitten by the environmental bug, along with spiders and mosquitoes, while at HONC. Through assisting with their nature programs, I gained a holistic appreciation for the environment, on top of my love of animals.

On weekends I'm still at HONC as an interpretative naturalist. During the week you can find me at the Alexandria Seaport Foundation (ASF), where I am the Environmental Education Director. This spring I have a chance to wear *both* hats at once as Hidden Oaks offers a fish and plant identification sailing program in conjunction with ASF on May 6, from 9 am to 1 pm.

ASF is a small, non-profit in Old Town Alexandria, housed in a two-story building *floating* on the water. Our mission is to strengthen the community by fostering stewardship of the Potomac River and helping build productive citizens. ASF uses wetland restoration projects, traditional wooden boat building and environmental education in its program.

The boats are an integral component of our environmental trips. Our 12-foot row boats are built in-house. Our 42-foot dory sailboat "Potomac," also built in-house, seats 27 people, so the hands-on program possibilities are great. We offer field study opportunities for schools, summer camps and community groups. The content is aligned with the Virginia Standards of Learning to help re-enforce what is being taught in the classrooms.

Bevin Skiff rowboats are also used in our programs. These boats seat six and provide participants an opportunity to try their hand at rowing, in addition to our other hands-on activities.

In our programs you can trawl for and identify fish and submerged aquatic vegetation. An important exercise is performing water chemistry tests. Trip participants gather a snapshot of the Potomac's health with the data collected from the water tests, the comparison of the number of tolerant to intolerant fish species to pollution and the number of exotic versus native species.



Bevin skiffs, 12-foot rowboats built at the Alexandria Seaport Foundation, take staff and visitors out for water chemistry experiments.

Environmental programs on land include study of macroinvertebrates and wetland walks in the field. Our environmental program also includes service learning projects like trash clean-ups along the Potomac and invasive plant removals.

As part of its wetlands programs, ASF provides regular opportunities for community involvement in restoration projects. Sixty acres of wetlands will be lost to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge construction project. ASF has rescued plants from the construction site and is currently propagating them in our greenhouses at Mt. Vernon and T.C. Williams high schools. Once the plants grow large enough, they will be used in restoration projects along the Potomac River, Ben Brenman Park and Lake Cook in Alexandria.

In partnership with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, ASF will be offering "Grasses for the Masses" workshops this spring. These workshops will provide the public schools or interested nature centers with the materials and know-how to propagate submerged aquatic vegetation in their homes or centers. The submerged aquatic vegetation will be planted in the Potomac and other local rivers in the spring.

These ASF events are not designed to be one-time experiences. We remember such experiences when they make a connection to us. Sometimes Mother Nature helps make an experience memorable by throwing in a surprise rainstorm or maybe an eagle flying overhead. As ASF's Environmental Educator, my goal is for our trips to provide that connection, giving youth and adults memories that help them value the health of our river environment and ultimately create stewards of the river.

This spring I look forward to getting back out on the water and taking my HONC friends out a time or two on the dory. ASF has quite a menu of opportunities to offer. If you are interested in hearing more about our upcoming trips, find us at our website, www.alexandriaseaport.org. To make reservations for the Hidden Oaks/ASF sailing program on May 6, call the nature center at 703-941-1065. The cost is \$15. 🌿

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OR: subscribe through our web site at
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YOUR PARKS

*Here are some of the parks
where spring begins*

Burke Lake Park
7315 Ox Road, Fairfax Station
Call 703-323-6600

Colvin Run Mill
10017 Colvin Run Road
Great Falls
Call 703-759-2771

Ellanor C. Lawrence Park
5040 Walney Road, Chantilly
Call 703-631-0013

Frying Pan Park
2709 West Ox Road, Herndon
Call 703-437-9101

Green Spring Gardens Park
4603 Green Spring Rd., Alexandria
Call 703-642-5173

Hidden Oaks Nature Center
7701 Royce Street, Annandale
Call 703-941-1065

Hidden Pond Nature Center
8511 Greeley Blvd., Springfield
Call 703-451-9588

Huntley Meadows Park
3701 Lockheed Blvd., Alexandria
Call 703-768-2525

Lake Accotink Park
7500 Accotink Park Rd., Springfield
Call 703-569-3464

Lake Fairfax Park
1400 Lake Fairfax Drive, Reston
Call 703-471-5414

Riverbend Park
8700 Potomac Hills Street
Great Falls
Call 703-759-9018

Sully Historic Site
Sully Road, Chantilly
Call 703-437-1794

Need directions? More information?
Visit us online at: www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks

Spring Specials

Wetlands Awareness Day

Huntley Meadows Park will host a Wetlands Awareness Day on Sunday, May 4, from noon to 3 pm. Enjoy an afternoon of wetland interpretation, wildlife presentations and a "Fun Fair" for kids. Bring your friends and family to celebrate the importance of wetlands to wildlife and you. Sponsored by the Friends of Huntley Meadows Park; call 703-768-2525 for more information.

April Bluebell Bonanza

Stroll along the Bull Run River valley to revel in the abundance of spring wildflowers. This extraordinary spot is a regional showplace for bluebells. The adventure, held on Tuesday, April 22, from 9 am to 1 pm, is for those 12 and older and costs \$8. Make reservations through Hidden Oaks Nature Center at 703-941-1065.

Farm Demonstration

On Saturday morning, April 26, it's time to visit the farm! Kidwell Farm, that is, a 1930s-era Fairfax dairy farm that has been preserved by the Park Authority for just such fun. Join in or watch the free farm demonstrations of machinery, daily chores like milking cows and caring for all the barn animals. Call Frying Pan Park at 703-437-9101 for more information.

Bluegrass under the Stars

On Saturday, from 6 to 9 pm, come to Sully Historic Site for an evening of entertainment and open skies. Hear Fairfax County Park Authority's own Paul Payne and his bluegrass band, "No Money Down." Enjoy the campfire and a tractor-drawn hayride around the grounds. A house tour is included in the price. Call Sully at 703-437-1794 for more information.



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